

Sandy Hook Light House
Sandy Hook, Monmouth County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-326

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Sandy Hook Light House
Sandy Hook, Monmouth County, New Jersey

Owner: United States Government

Date of Erection: 1764; practically rebuilt 1857

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: A tower ninety feet high

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - ^{Oct} hexagonal
stone structure lined with
brick surmounted by a
lantern enclosure of copper
and brass

Historical Data:

Sir Edmund Andros, Governor of New York, suggested in 1679-80 to Philip Carteret, Governor of East Jersey, that a sea mark for shipping be erected upon Sandy Point (the name then applied to Sandy Hook), and he urged the purchase of land for that purpose. However, this suggestion received no response and it was nearly a century later before it was taken up again.

In 1761 the merchants of New York offered to buy four acres of land on Sandy Hook on which to erect a light house. The owner Isick Hartshorne demanded 750 pounds sterling. This sum was considered unreasonable, and the plan was again delayed. At the

solicitation of a group of New York merchants on May 8, 1761, the assembly of New York authorized a lottery for raising three thousand pounds sterling to purchase land and erect a beacon. The matter was placed in the hands of these New York merchants who reported a year later that something more than twenty-six hundred pounds had been raised. Out of this sum a tract of land on Sandy Hook was purchased. This purchase was recognized in a legislative act of May 22, 1762. The right of "keeping and pasturing two cows on the lands outside of the tract and an agreement that no public house for selling strong liquors shall be erected" was included in the provisions of the deed. The money from the first lottery was insufficient for building the light house, and the assembly of New York authorized a second lottery for an additional three thousand pounds sterling. The drawing took place on June 13, 1763. The following year a stone light house 106 feet in height from the ground surface to the lantern was completed. The tower was 29 feet in diameter at the base and 15 feet at the top. The lantern was of iron and the tower top was covered with copper. This was the second light house in the American colonies, being antedated only by the one at Brant Point near Nantucket, Massachusetts which had been built three years previously.

Sandy Hook Light house is mentioned by Smith in his History of New Jersey; it also appears on a "chart of the bar of Sandy Hook and entrance of Hudson's River" made from surveys by Lieutenant Mills. In its original location it was originally about 500 feet from the northern extremity of the Hook. One hundred years later it was nearly a mile distant.

To maintain this light, the authorities of the Port of New York City imposed a tonnage tax on vessels entering the harbor. The following is a copy of the receipt of assessment paid to the Port of New York in 1789 now in the possession of the Monmouth County Historical Society at Freehold.

Port of
New York

Received 12 of Sept. One Thousand Seven Hundred
and Sixty Nine of Samuel Gifford.....
Master of the Briggantine Cornelia.....of the.....
Burthene of Thirty Five.....Tons.....
from Jamaica.....bound to.....
the sum of nineteen shillings & nine pence.....
being 22 pence per Ton due for maintenance of a Light House
upon Sandy Hook.....By order of an Act of the Colony.

Jonas Smith, Clerk

(On the left hand margin of this receipt is an engraving
of the ancient Light House).

The Provincial Congress ordered the light darkened
on March 4, 1776 to confuse the British fleet which was
expected. According to Nelson, Major Malcolm was entrusted
with this task. However, according to Mandeville one Cap-
tain Jacob Conover of Middletown was sent to Sandy Hook
and smashed the lamps of the light house. He was after-
wards taken a prisoner and confined to the sugar house in
New York.

The light was probably not in service again
until after the war, for the British occupied this area.
During the Revolutionary War, the Hook was fortified by
the British and garrisoned by regular troops or their
refugee allies. General David Forman with a party of
Monmouth County militia attempted to take the area but
was unsuccessful. After the war with the reorganization
of the colonies as states, Sandy Hook came within the
territory of New Jersey. In 1787 a law was enacted com-
pelling all vessels even the small craft engaged in the
daily market commerce to execute regular "entrance and
clearance papers" at the New York Custom House. This
regulation was resented especially by the New Jersey boat

men and finally in retaliation New Jersey levied a tax on the Sandy Hook Light House of thirty pounds a month which aggravated the feeling between the two states. Continental Congress about 1790 recognized as legal further jurisdiction over the light by New Jersey.

On February 26, 1806 the Federal government purchased Sandy Hook Light and thereafter it was under control of the Light House Board.

A practically new edifice was erected in 1857. The tower is of brick rising to a height of seventy-seven feet. The light is ninety feet above sea level. It was originally an important guide for shipping, but has been regulated to a secondary place by the Neversink lights on the elevated grounds of the Atlantic Highlands.

The history of Sandy Hook is full of interest. The land was purchased from the Indians by Richard Hartshorne in 1678. The following is a copy from Salter of the agreement made between Richard Hartshorn and the Indians.

"The 8th of August, 1678. Whereas the Indians pretend that formerly, when they sold all the land upon Sandy Hook, they did not sell, or did except liberty to plums, or to say the Indians should have liberty to go on Sandy Hook, to get plums when they please, and to hunt upon the land and fish, and to take dry trees that suited them for cannows. Now know all men by these presents, that I, Richard Hartshorne, of Portland, in the county of Monmouth, in East Jersey, for peace and quietness sake, and to the end there may be no cause of trouble with the Indians and that I may not for the future have any trouble with them as formerly I had, in their dogs killing my sheep, and their hunting on my lands, and their fishing, I have agreed as followeth:

"These presents witnesseth, that I, Vowavapon, Hendricks, the Indians sonn, having all the liberty and privileges of pluming on Sandy Hook, hunting, fishing, fowling, getting cannows &c., by these presents, give grant, bargain, sell, unto Richard Hartshorne, his heirs and assigns forever, all the liberty and privilege of pluming, fishing, fowling, and hunting, and howsoever reserved and excepted by the Indians for him, the said Richard Hartshorne, his heirs and assigns, to have, hold, possess, and enjoy forever, to say that no Indian, or Indians, shall or hath no pretense to lands or timber, or liberty, privileges on no pretense whatsoever on any part a parcell of land, belonging to the said Richard Hartshorne, to say Sandy Hook or land adjoining to it, in consideration the said Hartshorne, hath paid unto the said Vowavapon, thirteen shillings money; and I the said Vowavapon, do acknowledge to have received thirteen shillings by these presents. Witness my hand and seal.

"VOWAVAPON X his mark

"TOCUS X his mark

"Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of
John Stout."

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Material collected by George Delatush,
Monmouth County Supervisor and Nathaniel
R. Ewan, Survey Photographer

Walter C. Hart

Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.T.A.
District Officer